EPIC COMICS
THE SISTERHOOD of STEEL
SISTERHOOD OF STEEL5
AUGUST 1985
$1.50
$1.75 CANADA
MARVEL

creator / writer
CHRISTY MARX

creator / artist
MIKE VOSBURG

EPIC COMICS

editor
ARCHIE GOODWIN

associate editor
LAURIE SUTTON

letterer
TOM ORZECHOWSKI
L. LOIS BUHALIS

logo design
PETER LEDGER

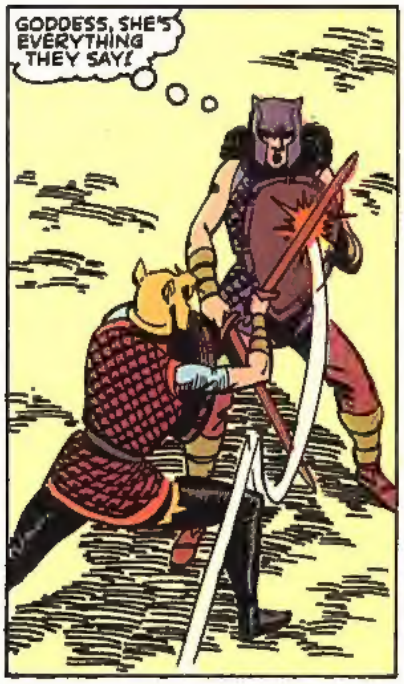
consulting editor
JIM SHOOTER

SISTERHOOD OF STEEL™ Vol. 1, No. 5, August, 1985. Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President; Stan Lee, Publisher; Michael Hobson, Group Vice-President; Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. Office of Publication: 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. Published bi-monthly. SISTERHOOD OF STEEL™ (including all prominent characters featured in this issue) and the distinctive likenesses thereof are the trademarks of Christy Marx and Mike Vosburg. "Epic Comics" is a registered trademark of the Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All SISTERHOOD OF STEEL™ material copyright ©1985 Christy Marx and Mike Vosburg. All other material © 1985 Marvel Comics Group. All rights reserved. Price $1.50 per copy in the US and $1.75 in Canada. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and / or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. Printed in Canada.

"HOW DID MY LIFE GET SO COMPLICATED?
"MY BEST FRIEND, KELKI, HAS RUN AWAY WITH HER LOVER. NOW SHE'S A RENEGADE IN THE EYES OF THE SISTERHOOD!
"VANDALIS, THE PRINCESS OF SWORDS, TRIED TO KILL ME, AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY!
"I FOUGHT MY FIRST BATTLE AT SEA AGAINST THE SLAVERS OF GIAOUR. IT WASN'T THE GRAND AND GLORIOUS EVENT I'D DREAMT OF...NOT WITH SO MANY DEAD AND MAIMED AROUND ME.
"STILL, THOSE OF US WHO SURVIVED WERE PROMOTED FROM CADET TO WARRIOR STATUS. AND DURING A NIGHT ON THE TOWN, I MET GWIN."
"Ah, GWIN, WHAT A LOVELY NIGHT WE HAD! YOU PROMISED TO WAIT FOR ME AT OUR SECRET PLACE IN THE RUINS. DID YOU MEAN IT OR WILL I MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF?

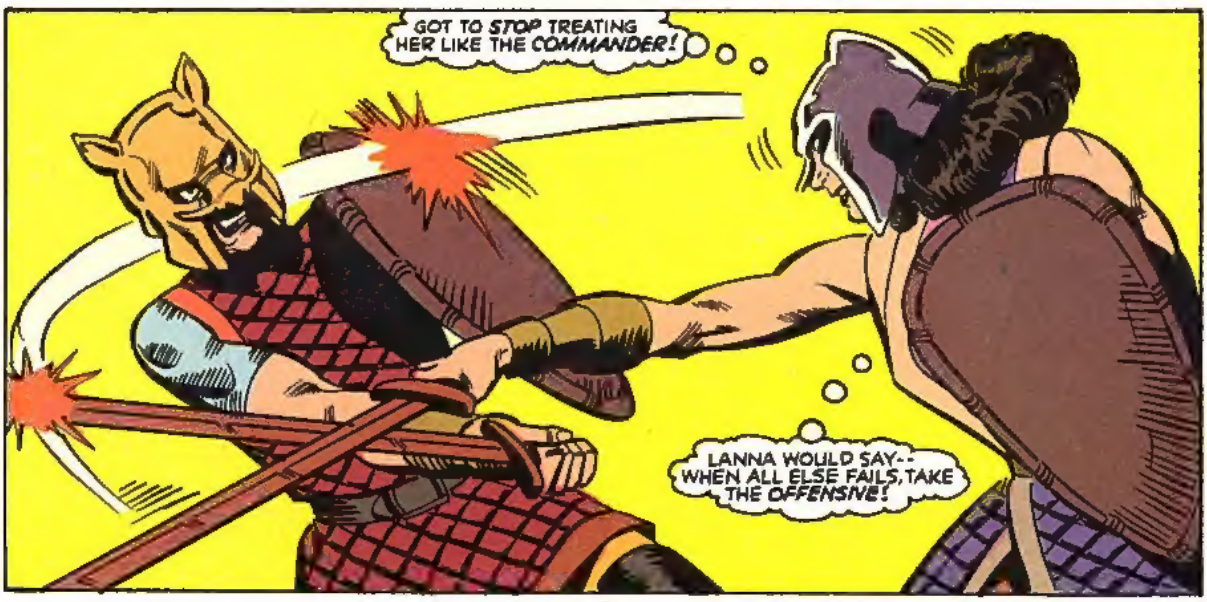
"AS IF THAT WEREN'T ENOUGH, I'M HAUNTED BY THE FEELING THAT COMMANDER GLESPA IS WATCHING ME!
"I'VE SENSED IT FROM THE FIRST DAY WHEN I HEARD MY NAME MENTIONED AND SHE GAVE ME THE STRANGEST LOOK!
"I'LL BET ANY MONEY THE PRINCESS OF SWORDS IS BEHIND IT, SOMEHOW!"
DINDRA THINKS I'M CRAZY, IMAGINING THINGS. I CAN'T TELL HER WHAT HAPPENED THE NIGHT OF THE RITUAL WITHOUT BREAKING MY VOW OF SECRECY TO THE PRIESTESS!
MAYBE... MAYBE IF I CAME RIGHT OUT AND ASKED THE COMMANDER--
BORONWÉ, LET'S START WITH YOU!
I WANT SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD SPARRING TO EVALUATE YOUR TECHNIQUE. NOTHING FANCY!
YES, CAPTAIN.
STACIA, I'D LIKE TO HAVE A ROUND WITH THIS GIRL, IF YOU DON'T MIND!
OF COURSE, COMMANDER!

I KNEW IT! SHE'S OUT TO GET ME! DINDRA WILL HAVE TO BELIEVE ME NOW!


GODDESS, SHE'S EVERYTHING THEY SAY!

SHE'S CUTTING THROUGH MY DEFENSE!

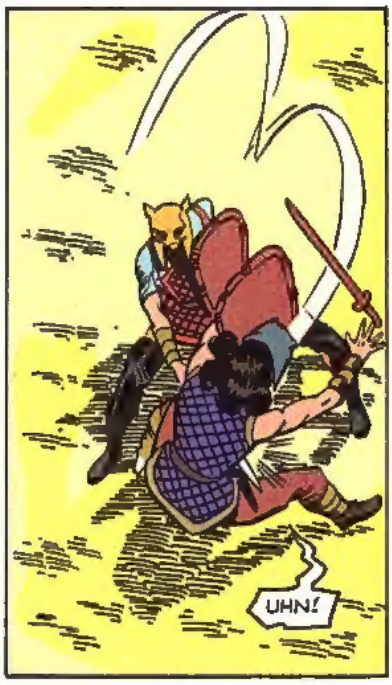
DAMNIT!


GOT TO STOP TREATING HER LIKE THE COMMANDER!
LANNA WOULD SAY-- WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, TAKE THE OFFENSIVE!

SHATH'S FLEAS!
THATAGIRL, BORONWË! GIVE IT TO HER!
QUIET!

SHE'S TOO GOOD! I CAN'T GET THROUGH!

OH, NO!


UHN!

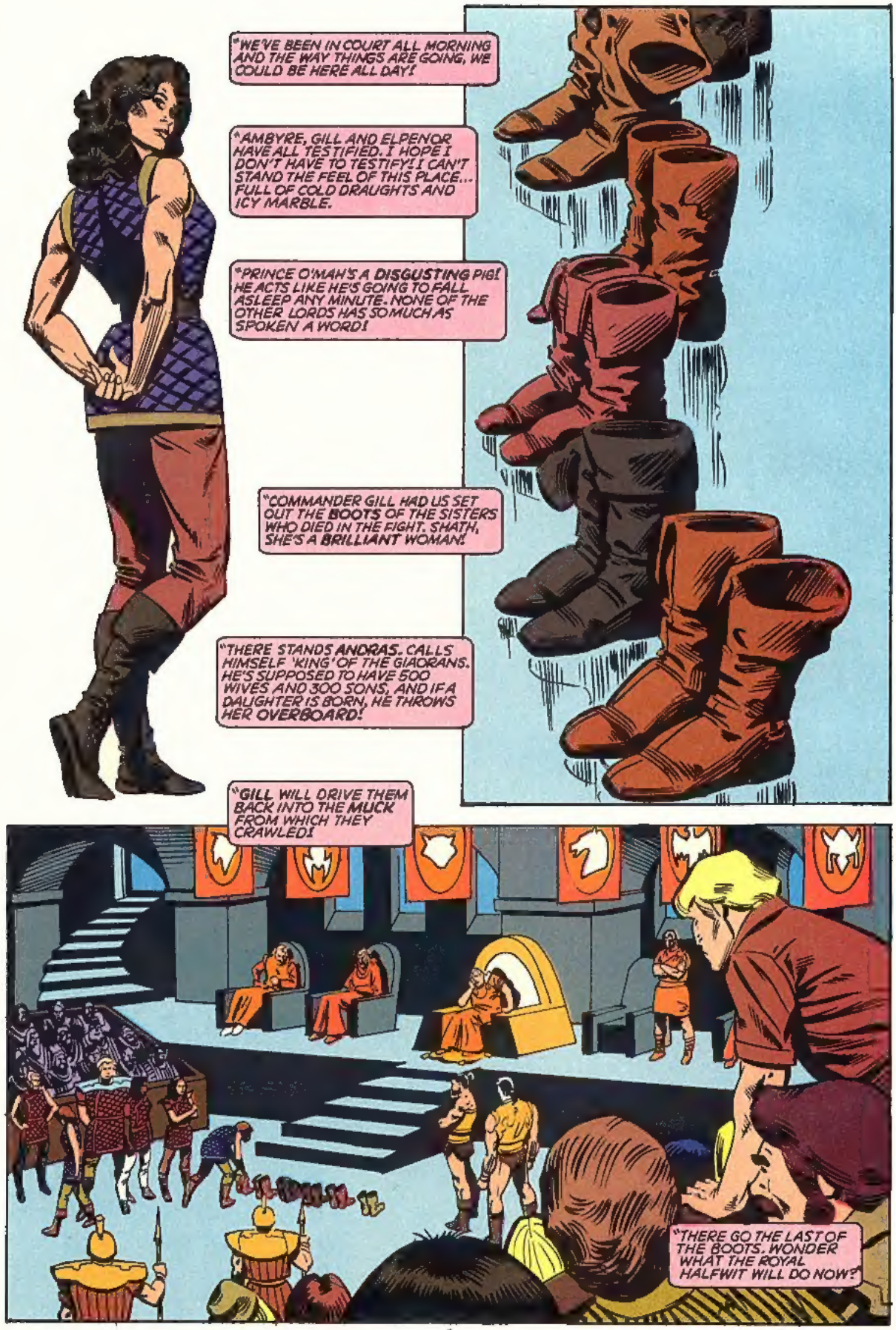
GOOD WORKOUT.
Uh...THANK YOU, COMMANDER!

WELL DONE, BORONWË! THAT'S HIGH PRAISE FROM HER!
IF THAT'S PRAISE, I'D HATE TO SEE HER INSULTS!

FAELLE, QUEEN OF SWORDS, CONFERS WITH ZELINE, THE MATRON, ON ON ECONOMIC MATTERS. INTO THIS MUNDANE DISCUSSION OF DEBITS AND CREDITS BURSTS VANDALIS, PRINCESS OF SWORDS.
THE GIAOURANS HAVE ATTACKED!
Passion, Pain and Politics

CLEAR THE ROOM!
THIS IS MILITARY BUSINESS!
ZELINE MAY STAY. IT IS HER RIGHT!
TUVA, YOU REMAIN ALSO.
YES, MY LADY.
WHAT IS THIS ATTACK?!
I WARNED YOU! THE SLAVERS GROW BOLDER BY THE DAY!
THEY ATTACKED A SHIP OF CADETS WHEN IT WAS BARELY OUT OF SIGHT OF THE ISLAND!
IF I MAY SEE THE SCROLL, PRINCESS.
REALLY, VANDALIS, YOU'RE OVERLY DRAMATIC. IT'S FROM COMMANDER GILL, FAELLE. THERE WAS AN ATTACK, BUT THE GIAOURAN$ WERE DRIVEN OFF, WITH MANY LOSSES ON BOTH SIDES. SHE'S BRINGING CHARGES AGAINST THEM IN THE ROYAL COURT OF ORANGE.
THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR THOSE LOSSES!

TRAINING HAS GOTTEN LAX AND OUR CADETS ARE WEAK! WE MUST BE STRONG, OR THE GIAOURANS WILL DESTROY US!
NOW IS THE TIME TO DECLARE WAR!
I'LL ATTEND TO THE CHARGES AGAINST THE GIAOURANS IN PERSON!
Unh... Unh...
MY LADY!
SEND FOR THE PRIESTESS! QUICKLY!
HOW DID IT GO?
AS I EXPECTED! FAELLE IS ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE! SHE'S IN NO SHAPE TO STOP ME, AND GREYAN WILL BE TOO BUSY TRYING TO KEEP HER ALIVE TO GET IN MY WAY!
SEND A RUNNER TO THE DOCKS! I WANT MY SHIP READY WITHIN THE HOUR!


"WE'VE BEEN IN COURT ALL MORNING AND THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING, WE COULD BE HERE ALL DAY!
"AMBYRE, GILL AND ELPENOR HAVE ALL TESTIFIED. I HOPE I DON'T HAVE TO TESTIFY! I CAN'T STAND THE FEEL OF THIS PLACE... FULL OF COLD DRAUGHTS AND ICY MARBLE.
"PRINCE O'MAH'S A DISGUSTING PIG! HE ACTS LIKE HE'S GOING TO FALL ASLEEP ANY MINUTE. NONE OF THE OTHER LORDS HAS SO MUCH AS SPOKEN A WORD!
"COMMANDER GILL HAD US SET OUT THE BOOTS OF THE SISTERS WHO DIED IN THE FIGHT. SHATH, SHE'S A BRILLIANT WOMAN!
"THERE STANDS ANDRAS. CALLS HIMSELF 'KING' OF THE GIAORANS. HE'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE 500 WIVES AND 300 SONS, AND IF A DAUGHTER IS BORN, HE THROWS HER OVERBOARD!
"GILL WILL DRIVE THEM BACK INTO THE MUCK FROM WHICH THEY CRAWLED!
"THERE GO THE LAST OF THE BOOTS. WONDER WHAT THE ROYAL HALFWIT WILL DO NOW?

THIS, uh, DISPLAY HAS, uh, GONE ON LONG ENOUGH, COMMANDER. YOU HAVE MADE YOUR, uh, POINT.
I'M GROWING, uh, ABSOLUTELY FAMISHED! MAKE YOUR CHARGES AND LET US, uh, GET THIS BUSINESS, uh, OVER WITH!
I PRESENT YOU WITH THE LIST OF CHARGES WHICH HAVE BEEN MADE! ORANGE IS BOUND BY TREATY TO THE SISTERHOOD AND THOSE WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES, ARE ENEMIES TO ORANGE!

WE DEMAND THE IMMEDIATE EXILE OF ALL GIAOURANS.
FURTHERMORE, WE DEMAND REPARATIONS, THOUGH NO AMOUNT OF GOODS OR MONEY COULD REPLACE THE VALIANT LIVES THAT WERE TAKEN!

MOST ROYAL PRINCE! WE STAND ACCUSED, BUT WHAT PROOF IS THERE BEYOND A PILE OF OLD BOOTS AND THE DUBIOUS TESTIMONY OF THESE WOMEN?

KING ANDRAS, uh, RAISES A VALID, uh, QUESTION.
WHERE IS YOUR, uh, MATERIAL PROOF THAT THESE ATTACKERS WERE, uh, GIAOURANS?

THAT'S YOUR CUE! MOVE YOUR BUTTS! GET THAT STUFF OUT THERE!
"Brrr. THERE'S MURDER IN THEIR EYES NOW!
"ONE GOOD THING ABOUT MARBLE...
"...METAL MAKES A NICE, LOUD CRASH AGAINST IT!"
TAKE THAT, CREEPS!
THIS ARMOR AND THESE WEAPONS WERE TAKEN FROM THE BODIES OF THE GIAOURANS LEFT BEHIND AFTER THE ATTACK.
TAKE A GOOD LOOK, SLAVER! DO YOU STILL DENY THEY WERE YOUR MEN? I CAN BRING IN THE BODIES, IF YOU INSIST, BUT THEY WON'T BE A PLEASANT SIGHT!

I CANNOT DENY THAT THESE ARE GIAOURAN. BUT THIS ATTACK, *IF* IT TOOK PLACE, WAS DONE *WITHOUT* MY KNOWLEDGE!
GIVE ME THE TIME, AND I SWEAR I WILL *FIND* THE OUTLAWS AND BRING THEM TO *JUSTICE* MYSELF!
YOUR HONORABLE PLEA HAS, uh, TOUCHED OUR, uh, ROYAL HEART! YOUR REQUEST IS, uh, GRANTED!
PRINCE O'MAH, WE *OBJECT*--
OUR DECISION *STANDS*! THIS, uh, COURT IS ADJOURNED!
"O'MAH DID EVERYTHING IN THEIR FAVOR! BY THE GODDESS, SOMETHING STINKS ABOUT THIS!"
A *CURSE* ON YOU AND *ALL* YOUR *SONS*!

THE GIAOURANS WITHDRAW TO THE GUEST PALACE PRINCE O'MAH HAS PROVIDED THEM. THERE ANDRAS IS FREE TO FULLY VENT HIS RAGE.

I FINALLY HAVE O'MAH EATING FROM MY HAND AND SOME FOOL *THREATENS* IT ALL WITH ONE, STUPID, *WORTHLESS* ATTACK ON THE SISTERHOOD!

NONE OF *US* KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT IT, FATHER!

WHERE'S BAKKRAM? IT'S THE KIND OF DAMN THING HE'D DO!

HE *LEFT* FOR HOME TWO DAYS *BEFORE* THE ATTACK.

HAVE THE SHIP FULLY LOADED *TONIGHT!* WE SAIL ON THE DAWN TIDE! IF IT'S BAKKRAM, I'LL HAVE HIS LIVER ON A PLATE!

FATHER, I--I WOULD LIKE PERMISSION TO REMAIN IN PORT--

I *WARNED* YOU ABOUT GIVING ME LIP, ELQUIN!

WE SAIL AT DAWN..

...*ALL* OF US!

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

IT'S EARLY AFTERNOON BEFORE BORONWE AND DINDRA ARE RELEASED FROM DUTY.

. .THOUGHT WE'D NEVER GET LUNCH. COULD YOU *BELIEVE* HOW HE SPOKE TO THE COMMANDER?

I'D NEVER BE A DIPLOMAT! I WOULD'VE KNIFED HIM THEN AND THERE! HE'S A PERVERT ANY-WAY, FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, AND..

DO YOU MIND?! WE'RE *TRYING* TO SLEEP IN HERE!

I'M SORRY! IT'S SO EARLY, I--

HAVEN'T YOU SEEN THE DUTY ROSTER? WE HAVE *PATROL* TONIGHT!

TONIGHT! OF ALL THE LOUSY LUCK!

BUT THAT ISN'T FAIR! WE'VE BEEN ON DUTY *ALL MORNING!*

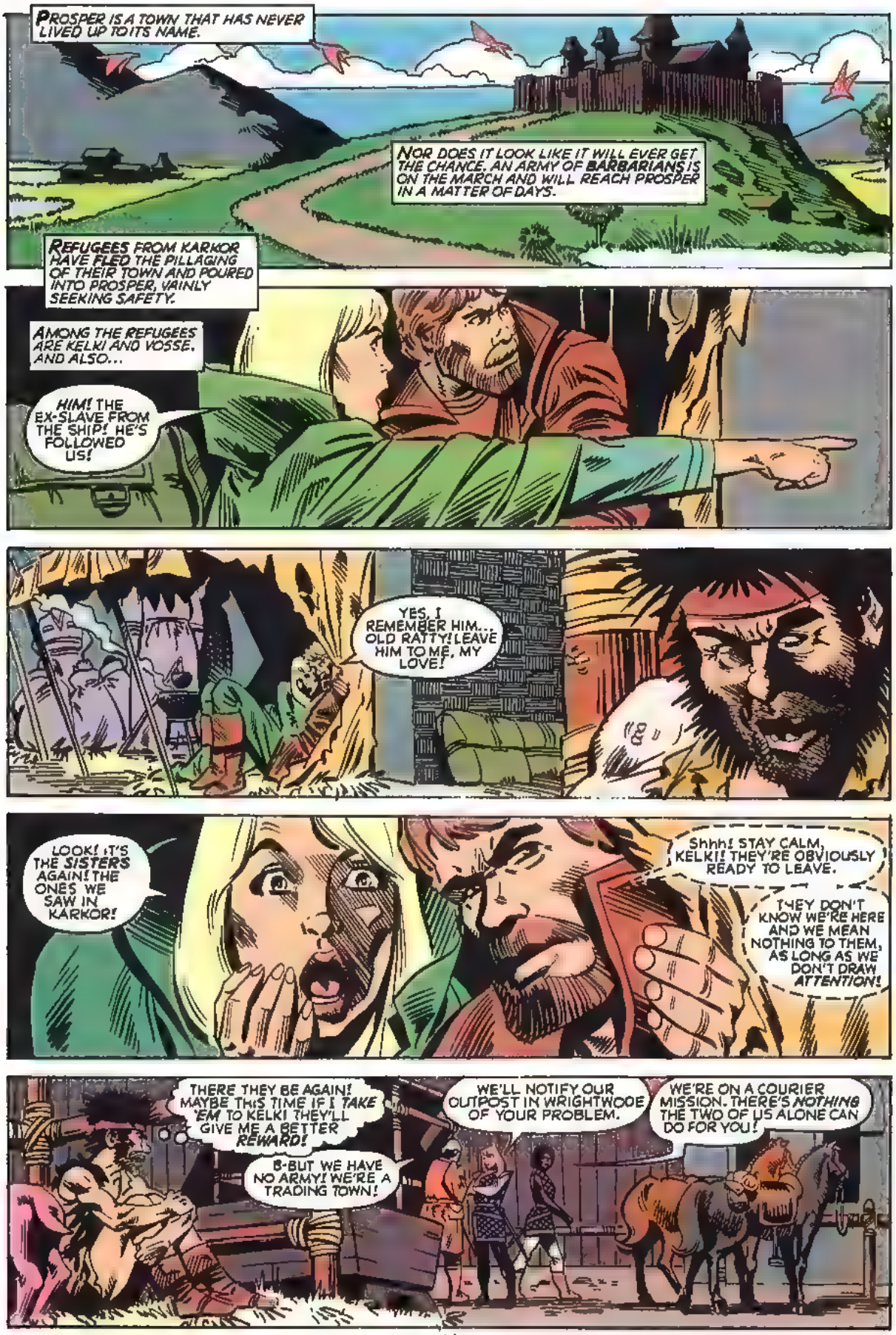
IT ISN'T THAT! I WANTED TO.. I WAS GOING TO... oh, HELL.

OOOH, THAT MAN, YOU MEAN? DON'T WORRY, BO, I'LL BET HE'LL--

GO TO SLEEP OR GO OUTSIDE!

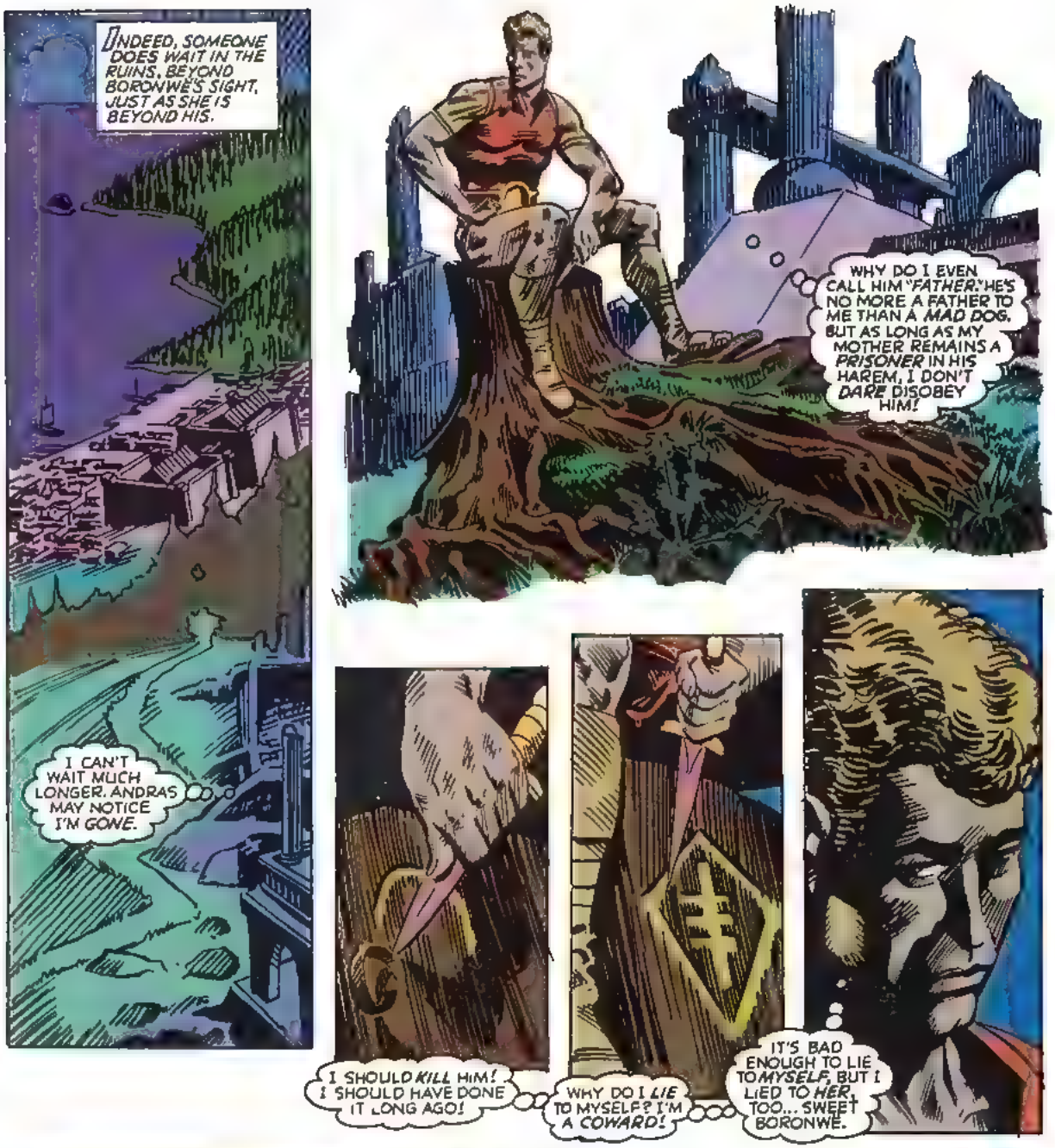
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.

AND DON'T CALL ME BO! I HATE IT!


PROSPER IS A TOWN THAT HAS NEVER LIVED UP TO ITS NAME.
NOR DOES IT LOOK LIKE IT WILL EVER GET THE CHANCE. AN ARMY OF BARBARIANS IS ON THE MARCH AND WILL REACH PROSPER IN A MATTER OF DAYS.
REFUGEES FROM KARKOR HAVE FLED THE PILLAGING OF THEIR TOWN AND POURED INTO PROSPER, VAINLY SEEKING SAFETY.
AMONG THE REFUGEES ARE KELKI AND VOSSE. AND ALSO...
HIM! THE EX-SLAVE FROM THE SHIP! HE'S FOLLOWED US!
YES, I REMEMBER HIM... OLD RATTY! LEAVE HIM TO ME, MY LOVE!
LOOK! IT'S THE SISTERS AGAIN! THE ONES WE SAW IN KARKOR!
Shhh! STAY CALM, KELKI! THEY'RE OBVIOUSLY READY TO LEAVE.
THEY DON'T KNOW WE'RE HERE AND WE MEAN NOTHING TO THEM, AS LONG AS WE DON'T DRAW ATTENTION!
THERE THEY BE AGAIN! MAYBE THIS TIME IF I TAKE 'EM TO KELKI THEY'LL GIVE ME A BETTER REWARD!
B-BUT WE HAVE NO ARMY! WE'RE A TRADING TOWN!
WE'LL NOTIFY OUR OUTPOST IN WRIGHTWOOD OF YOUR PROBLEM.
WE'RE ON A COURIER MISSION. THERE'S NOTHING THE TWO OF US ALONE CAN DO FOR YOU!

YOU KNOW *HOW* TO FIGHT! YOU CAN ORGANIZE US, SHOW US WHAT TO DO UNTIL HELP COMES! IN THE NAME OF *MERCY!*
IT'S TIME TO GO, NEESA!
NEESA? MY DEAR DEPARTED *MOTHER'S* NAME WAS NEESA!
ALL RIGHT. I'LL STAY!
Oh, THANK YOU! THANK YOU!
YOU DAMNED FOOL!
"MY DEAR *MOTHER'S NAME*"--WHAT CRAP! HE'S DEALT WITH SISTERS BEFORE! HE KNOWS WHAT HITS HOME!
THE MAN IS *TERRIFIED...*
...AND WITH *GOOD REASON!* BESIDES, THEIR ALLIANCE WITH WRIGHTWODE ENTITLES THEM TO PROTECTION. ONLY *ONE* OF US NEEDS TO GO ON FROM HERE!
PAL!... I KNOW THINGS HAVE BEEN...ROUGH BETWEEN US LATELY.
PLEASE, DON'T MAKE THIS HARD FOR ME!
Oh, NEESA, DAMN YOU! I'LL BE BACK!
I'LL BE WAITING!
I WONDER IF HIS MOTHER'S NAME REALLY WAS NEESA?

"NIGHT PATROL IS INCREDIBLY BORING.
"DOWN CIVIL ROAD, PAST THE PORT, THROUGH ORANGE, ACROSS CIVIL ROAD, NOW THROUGH PHYRUS.
"NOT EVEN SO MUCH AS A MINOR BARROOM FIGHT TO RELIEVE THE MONOTONY."
GUESS I SHOULDN'T BE ASKING FOR TROUBLE.
HEY, THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR!
..T IS!..T'S THE HILL OF RUINS! I WONDER IF GWIN'S THERE! IF ONLY THE MOON WERE FULL, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO--
BORONWË! WAKE UP!
NEVER ASSUME YOU'RE SAFE! ALWAYS BE ALERT!
YES, M'AM.
"GWIN, IF YOU'RE THERE, DON'T GIVE UP! PLEASE DON'T GIVE UP!"


INDEED, SOMEONE DOES WAIT IN THE RUINS, BEYOND BORONWE'S SIGHT, JUST AS SHE IS BEYOND HIS.
I CAN'T WAIT MUCH LONGER. ANDRAS MAY NOTICE I'M GONE.
WHY DO I EVEN CALL HIM "FATHER?" HE'S NO MORE A FATHER TO ME THAN A MAD DOG. BUT AS LONG AS MY MOTHER REMAINS A PRISONER IN HIS HAREM, I DON'T DARE DISOBEY HIM!
I SHOULD KILL HIM! I SHOULD HAVE DONE IT LONG AGO!
WHY DO I LIE TO MYSELF? I'M A COWARD!
IT'S BAD ENOUGH TO LIE TO MYSELF, BUT I LIED TO HER, TOO... SWEET BORONWE.
SHE'S PROBABLY FORGOTTEN ME BY NOW. OR MAYBE THEY'VE SENT HER AWAY, TO ANOTHER CITY. EVEN IF SHE HAD COME, WHAT COULD I OFFER HER? MORE LIES?
NO! WHEN I GET BACK, I'LL FIND HER AND TELL HER MY TRUE NAME. THAT I'M A GIAOURAN... SON OF SLAVERS! SHE'S NOT LIKE THE OTHER SISTERS! SHE'LL UNDERSTAND!
THE SHIP IS NEARLY LOADED. I'D BETTER GO.

IN PROSPER...
HE'S FOLLOWING THE SISTER! IF HE TELLS--
STAY HERE! THIS WON'T TAKE LONG!
BE CAREFUL, MY LOVE!
SHOULD I WAIT OR CALL HER NOW?
WHY WAIT--
GAHRR!
NOT ANOTHER SOUND! WE'VE SOMETHING TO SETTLE BETWEEN US, OLD RATTY!
NO, SIR! PLEASE, SIR! I AIN'T DONE NOTHING!

YOU THREATENED MY WOMAN! AND FOR THAT--
NOOOO!
HOLD!
IN A FEW DAYS, YOU'LL HAVE ALL THE KILLING YOU WANT! NOW PUT UP YOUR BLADE...
...OR I'LL CUT YOU DOWN!
HE'S THE ONE I TOLD YOU ABOUT! THE RUNAWAY SISTER'S WITH HIM!
HE'S A LYING CUR!
I THINK IT'S TIME I MET THIS WOMAN!

KELKI IS MY LADY-WIFE AND TOO DELICATE FOR--

I HEARD 'EM ON THE SHIP, *WHISPERIN'* ABOUT THE SISTERHOOD. THEY *RAN* LIKE RABBITS FROM YOU AND YER FRIEND AND HID! IF THAT AIN'T GUILTY-LIKE, THEN I'M A--

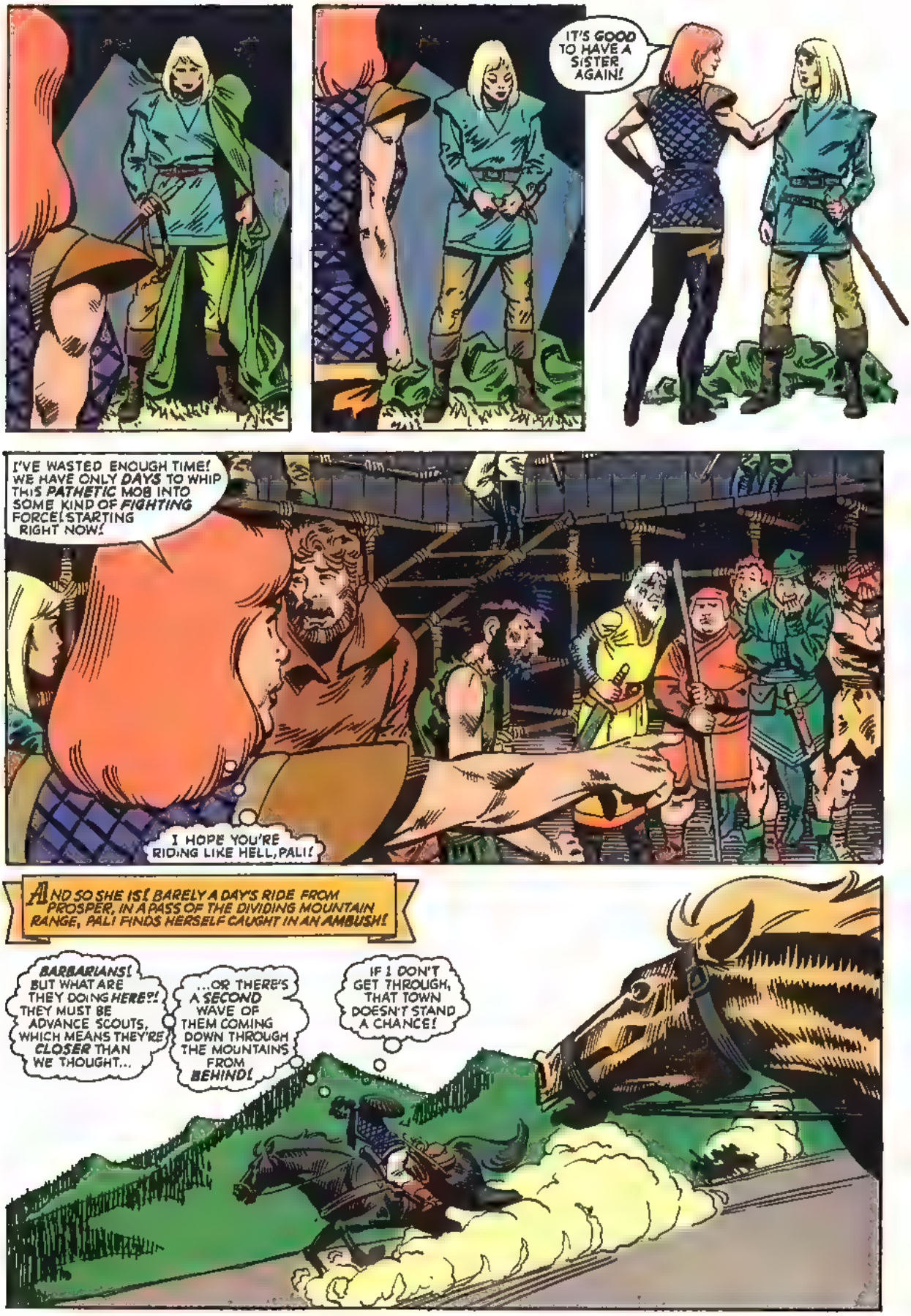
THAT'S *ENOUGH!* SHE CAN SPEAK FOR HERSELF! WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO *SAY*, KELKI?

I...AM HIS WIFE AND I'M WITH CHILD. THAT IS ALL!

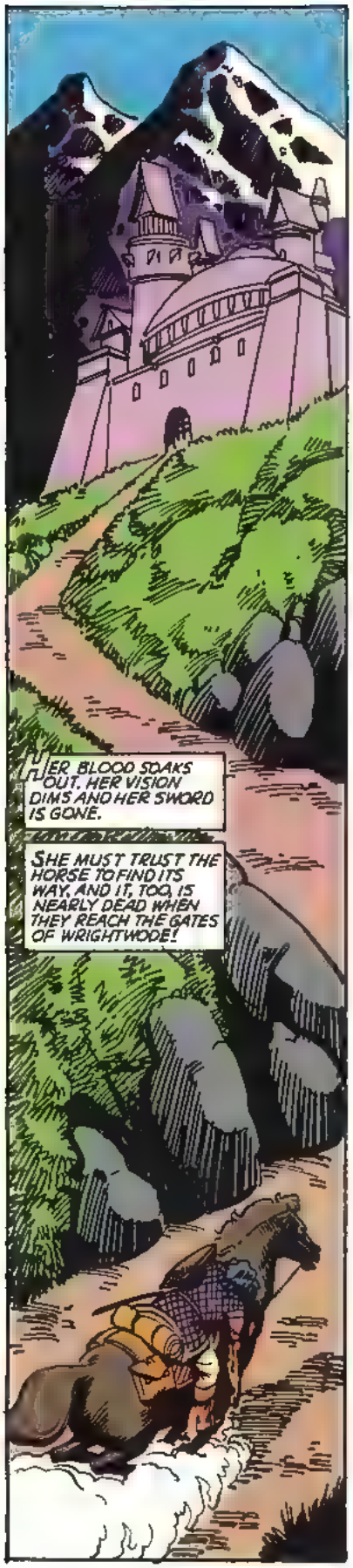
IT'S NOT THAT HARD TO RUN AWAY FROM THE SISTERHOOD, BUT SOME THINGS ***CANNOT*** BE HIDDEN--THE WAY TRAINING SHAPES OUR BODIES...AND OUR *MINDS*.

DUTY KEEPS ME HERE. I HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO ***DEFEND*** THIS TOWN AND I CANNOT LAY THAT OBLIGATION UPON YOU AGAINST YOUR WILL. IF THE BARBARIANS COME TOO SOON, I'LL ***DIE*** HERE... ALONE.

WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS--I NEED ALL THE HELP I CAN GET! AND IF WE SHOULD SURVIVE... THE *GODDESS* WILL DECIDE OUR *FATES!*


IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A SISTER AGAIN!
I'VE WASTED ENOUGH TIME! WE HAVE ONLY DAYS TO WHIP THIS PATHETIC MOB INTO SOME KIND OF FIGHTING FORCE! STARTING RIGHT NOW!
I HOPE YOU'RE RIDING LIKE HELL, PALI!
AND SO SHE IS! BARELY A DAY'S RIDE FROM PROSPER, IN A PASS OF THE DIVIDING MOUNTAIN RANGE, PALI FINDS HERSELF CAUGHT IN AN AMBUSH!
BARBARIANS! BUT WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE?! THEY MUST BE ADVANCE SCOUTS, WHICH MEANS THEY'RE CLOSER THAN WE THOUGHT...
...OR THERE'S A SECOND WAVE OF THEM COMING DOWN THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS FROM BEHIND!
IF I DON'T GET THROUGH, THAT TOWN DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE!

PALI'S HORSE HAS RIDDEN HARD WHILE THE BARBARIANS HAVE STRONG MOUNTAIN STEEDS! THEY ARE FRESH, FIERCE AND OUTNUMBER HER THREE TO ONE! BUT THEY WILL MAKE A FATAL MISTAKE!
AS THEY POUND WILDLY OVER ROCKY SOIL, PALI CAN DO LITTLE MORE THAN RAISE HER SHIELD AGAINST THE BARBARIAN'S FLAILING SWORD!
GAAGH!
HIYA! I CUT HER!
CATCH HER--
NAY! THE CHIEF AWAITS US! AND I CUT HER DEEP!
THE WAY SHE'S BLEEDING, SHE'LL BE DEAD BEFORE SHE LEAVES THE PASS!
AND SHE IS ONLY A WOMAN!


HER BLOOD SOAKS OUT. HER VISION DIMS AND HER SWORD IS GONE.
SHE MUST TRUST THE HORSE TO FIND ITS WAY, AND IT, TOO, IS NEARLY DEAD WHEN THEY REACH THE GATES OF WRIGHTWODE!

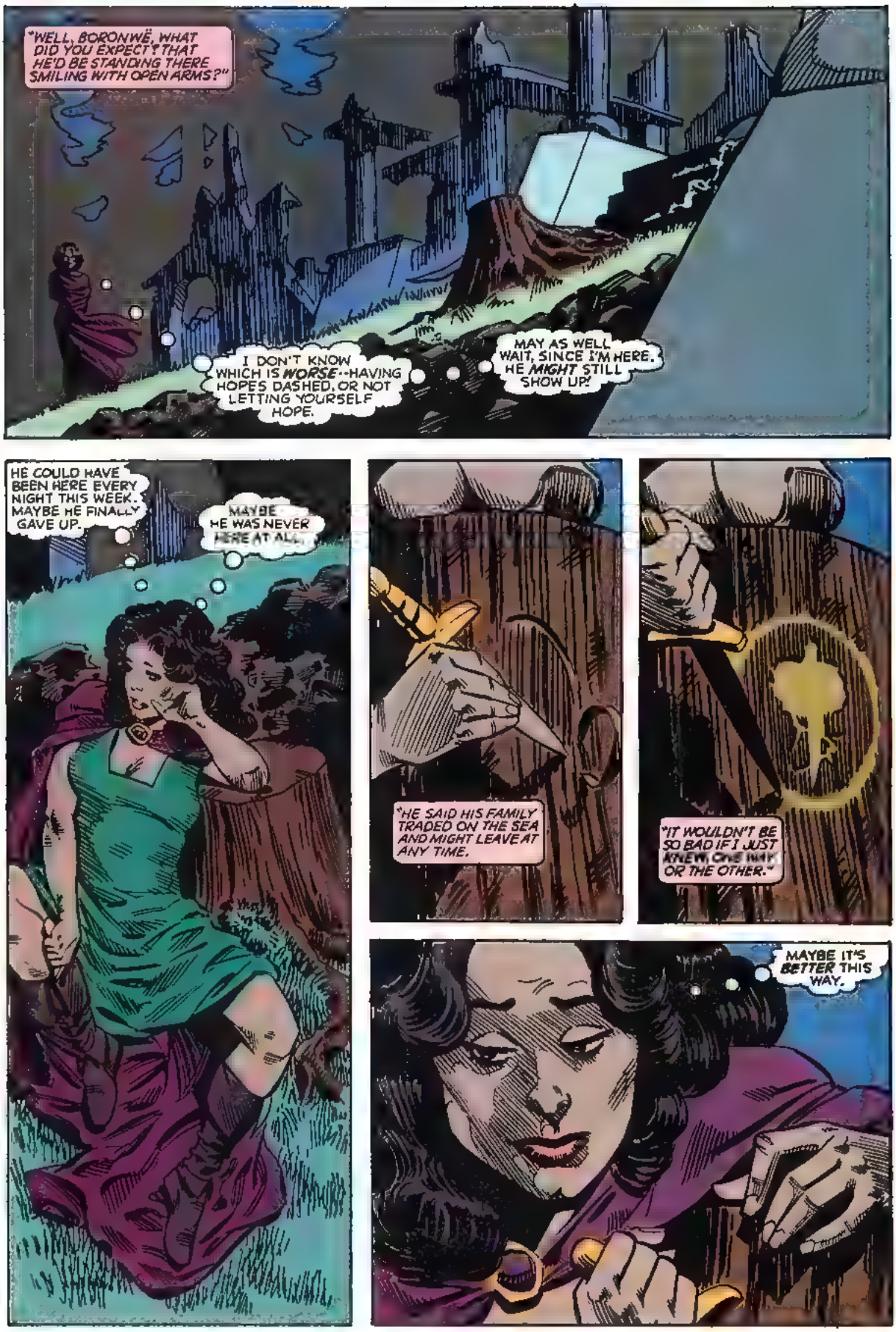
SISTERS TO READINESS! INJURED RIDER!

WHO IS IT?!
PALI! HURRY, CAPTAIN! SHE'S IN BAD SHAPE!

PALI, IT'S CELIA! WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE'S NEESA? CAN YOU TALK?!
NEESA IN PROSPER... BARBARIANS... KARKOR RAZED... PROSPER...NEXT... SCOUTS. .IN PASS...

WHERE'S THE MEDIC?! GET HER OVER HERE!
PUT THE TOWN ON FULL ALERT!
GET A RIDER OUT TO PHYRUS, ON THE DOUBLE!

C'MON, BORONWE! WE'VE FINALLY GOT A NIGHT OFF! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO HANG AROUND HERE, ARE YOU? WE'RE ALL HEADING FOR THE PILGRIM'S REST!
FOR THE TENTH TIME, I'M NOT GOING! YOU CAN EITHER LEAVE ME ALONE...
...OR GET YOURSELF ANOTHER SWORDMATE!
NOT A CHANCE!
WHO ELSE WOULD BE DUMB ENOUGH TO LOAN ME MONEY? SEE YOU LATER!
HAVE FUN!


"WELL, BORONWË, WHAT DID YOU EXPECT? THAT HE'D BE STANDING THERE SMILING WITH OPEN ARMS?"
I DON'T KNOW WHICH IS WORSE--HAVING HOPES DASHED, OR NOT LETTING YOURSELF HOPE.
MAY AS WELL WAIT, SINCE I'M HERE. HE MIGHT STILL SHOW UP!
HE COULD HAVE BEEN HERE EVERY NIGHT THIS WEEK. MAYBE HE FINALLY GAVE UP.
MAYBE HE WAS NEVER HERE AT ALL.
"HE SAID HIS FAMILY TRADED ON THE SEA AND MIGHT LEAVE AT ANY TIME.
"IT WOULDN'T BE SO BAD IF I JUST KNEW, ONE WAY OR THE OTHER."
MAYBE IT'S BETTER THIS WAY.

I'M NOT LIKE KELKI. I *CAN'T* GO FALLING IN LOVE AND *RUNNING* OFF!

YEAH, IT'S BETTER THIS WAY.

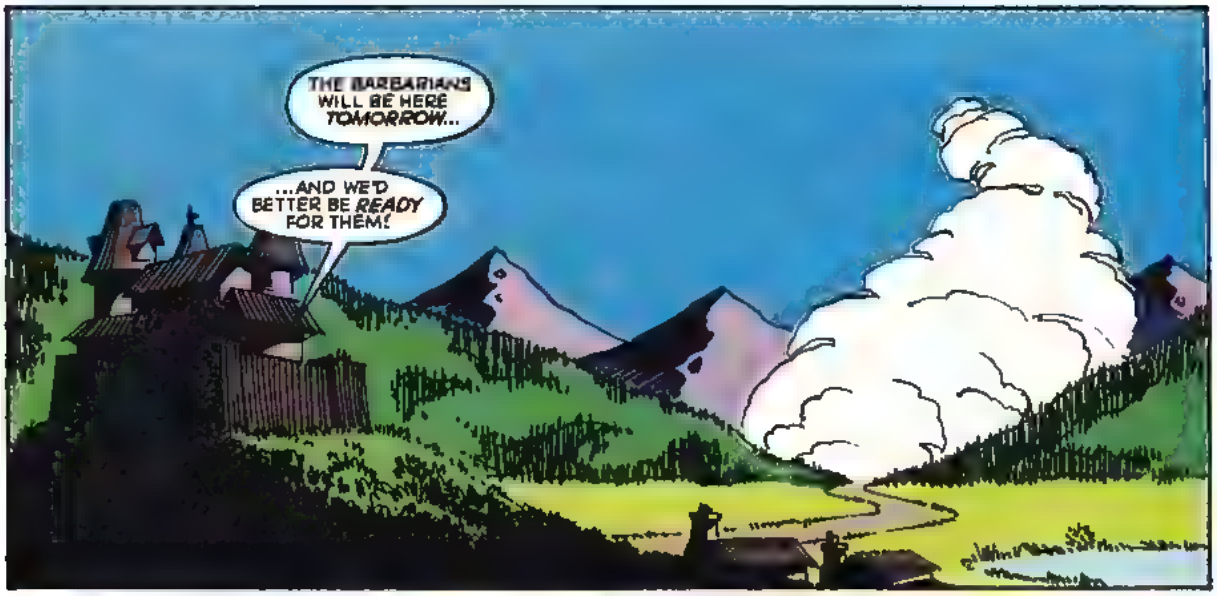
STILL... IT *WOULD* HAVE BEEN NICE.

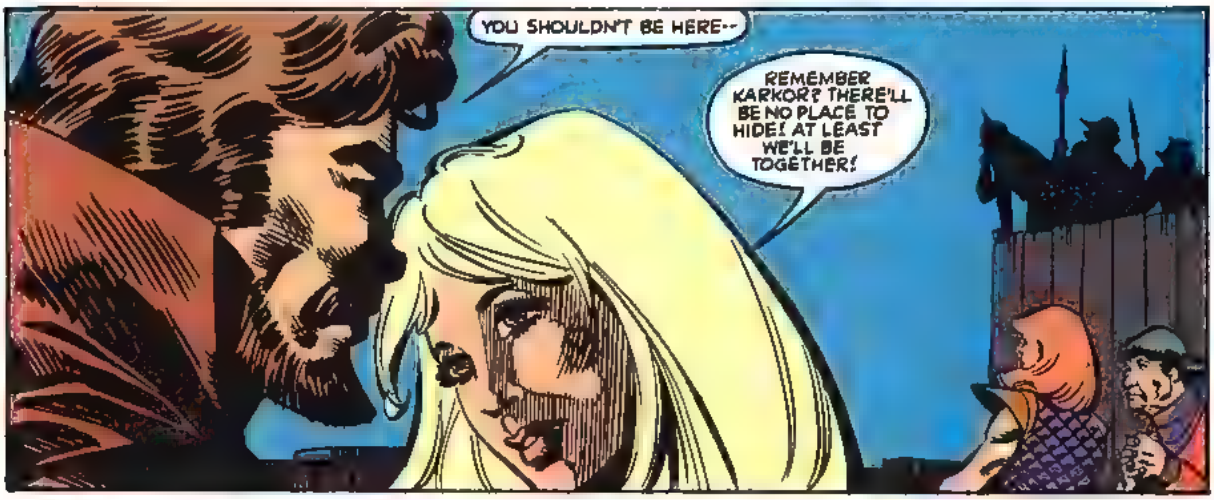
THE STRANDS OF BORONWË'S FATE DRAW TOGETHER, THOUGH SHE FEELS THEM NOT.

A RIDER HAS LEFT WIGHTWODE, BOUND AT TOP SPEED FOR THE SISTERHOOD HEADQUARTERS IN ORANGE-PHYRUS.

WHILE IN PROSPER...

SEE THAT CLOUD OF *DUST* IN THE DISTANCE? *THAT'S* WHY THE REFUGEES HAVE STOPPED COMING.


THE BARBARIANS WILL BE HERE *TOMORROW*...
...AND WE'D BETTER BE *READY* FOR THEM!

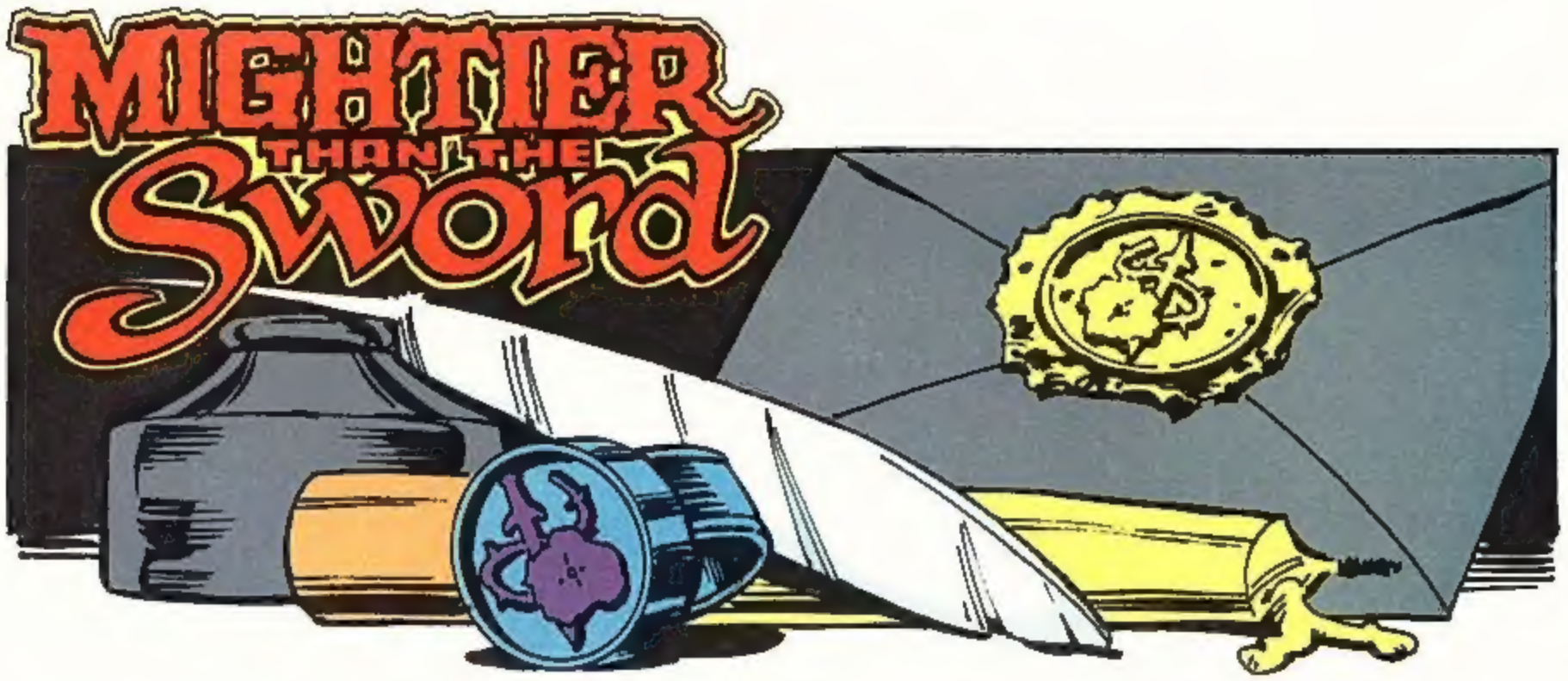

YOU SHOULDN'T BE HERE--
REMEMBER KARKOR? THERE'LL BE NO PLACE TO HIDE! AT LEAST WE'LL BE TOGETHER!

PHYRUS... YET AGAIN...
COMFORT IS SO BRIEF IN THIS WORLD.
Ah, LISTEN TO YOURSELF, YOU WHINING *WIMP*! SNAP *OUT* OF IT!
THERE'S ENOUGH TIME TO GO TO THE PILGRIM... HAVE A FEW DRINKS...WATCH DINDRA GAMBLE...

YEAH. REALLY *THRILLING*--

MAKE WAY!
SHATH!

LOOK AT THE LATHER ON THEM! I WONDER WHERE THEY'VE COME FROM?!
SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING BIG!
OUF!
EXCUSE ME, I-- PRINCESS?!
WHY, IF IT ISN'T LITTLE BORONWË! WHAT A DELIGHTFUL ACCIDENT. YOU MAY ATTEND TO ME, SINCE YOU'RE HERE!
Y-YES, MY LADY!
"HOW DID MY LIFE GET SO COMPLICATED?!"



We've had enormous praise for the cover of SOS #1 which was designed and pencilled by Mike Vosburg; painted and airbrushed by MIKE SAENZ. Thank you, Mike S., for your beautiful work on that cover.

The cover of *this* issue features design and pencils by MIKE VOSBURG, with painting by PETER LEDGER.

CM

Dear Christy, Mike and other Creative Geniuses,

I just decided to write you folks and tell you how impressed I am with the first two issues of **SOS** (was that intentional?), offer some suggestions, and of course contribute the inevitable bit of constructive criticism. Fans always like the fare a bit more after they contribute a bit of bodily fluids of their own.

I have a few problems with the society that has been constructed. It is, of course, not without precedent. The myths of the Amazons, and **Wonder Woman's** secret island, for a couple of examples. But there are a few problems created by an all-female society. I'm sure you've thought about all of these, but, just on the off-chance . . .

I'm confused about how the population of Ildana is kept stable. If all children brought to the island are purchased like Boronwë was, it seems to me that this is a slightly haphazard selection process for women, the majority of which are to become unmatched in battle skill. It seems that this would result in far too many culls than would be acceptable. Of course, if your sympathies lie on the other side of the nature / nuture controversy, then this is not a problem, but you have already pointed out that there are many culls. Are there many non-warfare-oriented jobs on the island to take care of these culls? Really? Well, maybe. However, a much simpler system would be for the sisters off-island to make periodic searches for new sisters among the young children of the mainland. Which brings me to another point.

Training in warfare commencing at the age of four? Seems a little extreme to me. That's before most kids in this world start kindergarten. Most kids don't even gain a realistic concept of death until the middle of grade school, and you're going to teach them killing at four?! I'm sorry, but I'm a psych. major in college and I can't help but feel that you're going to have a lot of warped kids, who will grow into a lot of warped adults. I would suggest that actual martial arts training begin at, maybe, nine or ten, and teaching up to that point concentrate on more general knowledge.

Back to the culls. One large gasp of outrage. "The week of trials is a time of culling — when failure means shame and reassignment to a menial job . . ." C'mon people. Any martial arts group worth its weight in strained beets knows that there is no shame in doing your best and failing. None! First of all, the instructors should make that clear, just as they should make it clear when a trainee is not doing his / her best. God knows they should have the talent to know the difference. Secondly, this shame would produce a hellava contingent of angry, resentful, dissatisfied "lower class" workers. Where's sisterhood when the stronger sisters look down upon the weaker? Probably the same place equality is now. Yuk.

Where are the old and the very young? The only old person I have seen so far is the Queen. I have seen no children. Are they kept on another part of the island? I suppose that the simplest answer would be that the old are the keepers and instructors of the very young. Okay. I can cope with that, but let us know they're there. I would be very interested to see some of the early training, for example.

Now, I'll raise a couple of points that I'm sure most readers will wonder about eventually. Love and sex. Kelki mentions that Boronwë has had men and enjoyed them. Hmmmm. How was this accomplished? (No, wait, I'll clarify that question.) I assume that there are no men on the island. If I am correct, then either the Sisterhood must go to the men, or vice versa. Either alternative could result in bizarre circumstances or somewhat

nasty situations. If sisters, especially novice sisters, were to make periodic trips to the mainland for this express purpose, either to pick up men or to pick up men, if you see what I mean . . . "Hey George, the boats'r in from the island! Let's go to the bars tonight and get us some!" Blechh. Or . . . "Herd them onto the boat, sister. I can't wait — it looks like we have some real good ones this time." Feh. Am I making a mistake concerning the isolation of the island, the extent to which novice sisters are confined to it, or the man-free nature of the island? Fill me in. Why must Kelki be found and judged by the Sisterhood? Why are those who are dissatisfied not allowed to simply leave? Sure, the sisters have provided for room and board, training, and so forth, but it seems that keeping the unwilling on the island amounts to little more than slavery, and goes against the very concept of sisterhood. But I digress. Onward.

I assume that lesbianism is, if not common, at least accepted on the island, as evidenced by the exchange between Vandalis and Commander Gill. Okay. Considering the nature of the circumstances and environment on the island, this is only logical. You'll get no protest here, only a warning. From many of your readers you'll get a resounding chorus of ickys, from the moral minority and other assorted cheap seats you'll get an outraged shotgun blast of fire and brimstone fired from the pulpit. You don't care? Great!! You have my admiration for courage displayed. But. If this courage is continued, the comic must eventually focus on characters that are obviously lesbians. If love and / or sex is to be expressed with the honesty shown so far (p. 11-12, 13-14, and 28 in issue 1 f'instance, 13-14 especially — beautiful!), then it's only reasonable. Otherwise it becomes an exercise in hypocrisy. Either way — good luck, you'll need it.

Enough criticism, however constructive. Now for some requests. Let's have some maps. Of the island, of the surrounding area, and of the world in general. I don't think that a glossary is all that necessary, but I would definitely appreciate more features like "The Matrix," and "The Ritual of Womanhood." This adds greatly to the sense of depth and history of the world you have created. I can't wait to hear Lanna's story concerning Vandalis when she finally gets around to telling it. Let's hear more about the mythology of this world, and especially more about the religion of the Sisterhood. By the way, the brambleflowers are the wrong color on the cover logo. Tsk. I especially enjoy the Daughters of Darkness. Besides acting as an effective check and balance to the warlike nature of the Sisterhood, they add just the right touch of mystique and magic to what is otherwise a pretty straightforward way of life. How are the Daughters chosen? How are they trained? How does their training differ from the others? Tell me more.

Patrick Williams
Jay, OK

"SOS" wasn't intentional. Just a coincidence. I never claimed the Sisterhood was perfect. In fact, its imperfections are crucial to creating the dramatic tensions and conflicts that make this book work.

Selection isn't completely random, but yes, culls are inevitable. There are many non-warrior jobs that must be filled on Ildana: meals to be cooked, clothes to be sewn, weapons to be made, animals and crops to be kept, buildings maintained and vast amounts of financial and personal records to be kept by the scribes, and so on.

There's an absolutely superb book entitled ***The Martial Arts*** *(author: Michel Random, publisher: Peerage Books, 59 Grosvenor St., London W1) in which there are photos of 3 and 4 year old children training in Kendo (Japanese sword). The oldest of this Master's pupils is 7.*

The Sisters don't learn killing at 4, but they begin to learn the skills and disciplines that will mean life or death later. Introduction to death, first in animals, then humans, comes later.

But the Sisterhood is not the martial arts. Although on the surface there's no shame attached to non-warrior positions, in a group that must promote competition and aggressiveness there is an unspoken feeling of failure among many of the girls. The older, retired warriors do train the young.

Young Sisters are taken on field trips to various cities and ports, otherwise they'd come from a lifetime on Ildana and be thrust rather unprepared on the rest of the world, which is vastly different.

I never guessed that one simple question, "Are they lovers?" would cause such comment. I was reaching for realism and honesty, not to promote a cause or create a stir. It was the natural question for Vandalis to ask.

A map is in the works. The story of the Lanna-Vandalis incident is planned, as of this writing, for issue #7.

Dear Folks,

I hadn't thought I was reading a feminist tract — I thought I was reading an adventure series, and a good one. I see in the letter column of issue 3 that some people are trying to make something more of it. I have no objec-

tions to people who want to take SOS that way, but I hope that you don't come to feel that you have a *cause. Causes* are sudden death for storytelling.

Apparently the Sisterhood buys infants who are not then free to leave. There is no choice involved here (Kelki couldn't say "Hey, I don't fit here; see you later"). There is a word for this type of situation, and the word is slavery. Given the Sisterhood's strongly enunciated anti-slavery position as stated in issue 3, I have to wonder what kind of Orwellian doublethink the Sisterhood leaders practice, and what it might do to someone who believes deeply in the Sisterhod (like Boronwë) when she realizes the contradiction.

Ted Noland
Columbia, SC

The slavery issue is one of the deliberate paradoxes of the Sisterhood. Sisters can buy their way out, but it isn't easy. I will be dealing more with this and you can bet it's something the Slavers of Glaour won't ignore.

Next issue, the forces that have been drawing Boronwë and Kelki back together come to a life-changing climax! Be with us for *"Loyalties."*

Mike and I are thrilled with the quality of the letters we've been receiving. As a favor, would all letter writers be sure to print or type your name and full return address. We will withhold your address from publication, if you request it. I'm building a mailing list and plan to send information about my personal newsletter, **Scrolls of the Sisterhood** to everyone on the list.

To "A Sister in Spirit," thank you for the explanation of the Lavender Left. I admit my ignorance.

Are you done with this issue? Good! Write to us about it!

CM

APPENDIX #4
HOW THE SISTERHOOD IS POPULATED

Every year the Sisterhood must have a new crop of girl children to populate its ranks, increase the power of the Sisterhood, and replace older Sisters killed in the field. A balance must be maintained between the numbers that will be needed and the numbers than can be supported.

The two categories of children are "Bought" and "Born."

"Born" children are a tiny minority. They occur when a Sister requests permission to bear a child. If permission is granted, the Sister gives birth on the island and the infant is taken from her, never to know the identity of her mother. If the baby is male, it is given away, either to the father, or sometimes in trade for a girl-baby. There's a subtle prestige to bearing a female, though no shame is attached to bearing a male. The Sisterhood discourages pregnancy amongst its members because it keeps them from duty.

"Bought" children make up the vast bulk of the Sisterhood. "Bought" usually means that a fee of some kind has been paid to the mother or family of the girl, though as often as not a girl might be given to the Sisterhood, especially since female children are not considered to be as useful as a male child. Sisters are sent all over the world on scouting missions looking for healthy girl children to bring to the Sisterhood.

Girl children are brought into the Sisterhood between the ages of 4 and 7. Girls older than 7 have proven less adaptable in the past and it is extremely rare for the Sisterhood to take anyone over 7, and never over the age of 10.

If a teen-age girl or grown woman approaches the Sisterhood, wishing to become a member, they have a slim chance of getting some position within the House of the Matron doing adminstrative or other menial work, but under no circumstances will she be admitted to the ranks of the warriors. The Sisterhood knows that true loyalty and service can only be obtained by those who have been raised from their earliest years within the group.

VANDALIS
PRINCESS OF SWORDS

Found abandoned as a 2-year-old babe on the doorstep of a Sisterhood outpost, Vandalis has known no other life. Indeed, from the beginning, she seemed perfectly suited to the martial life. Her tactical brilliance in the field and her battle skill helped her to move swiftly up the ranks, aided by her unbounded ambition. She became Princess at the astoundingly early age of 26 and had held the title for 6 years, with many strong suporters in the Sisterhood's governing bodies, the House of Gold and the House of Silver. She is regarded by her supporters as a powerful, capable leader; by her detractors as an obsessive, dangerous personality.

Mike '84
Vosburg